

Chronicles of Food Protection

www.vdacs.virginia.gov/fdsafety

February 2005

Happy New Year! We hope you all had a safe and happy holiday season. This year, each issue of the Chronicles of Food Protection will focus on one or two key factors that contribute to foodborne outbreaks in hopes of educating the food industry on how to reduce the number of foodborne illnesses this year and in the years to come. Additionally, look for details in the food security portion of this issue on the record keeping requirements for FDA's Bioterrorism Act that were released in December 2004.

Food Safety

Handwashing and Food Safety¹

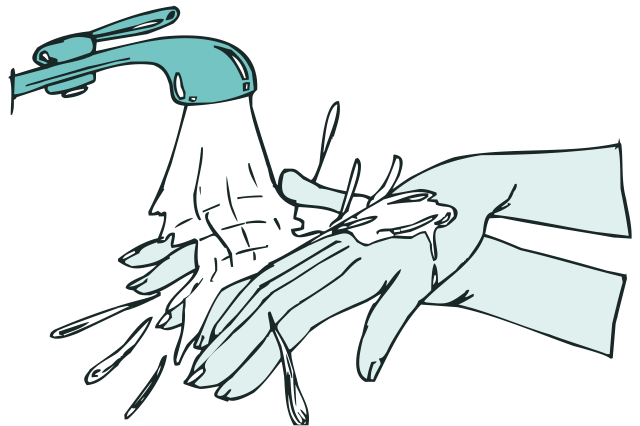
Hands are the part of the body that are most exposed to microorganisms because they touch many things every day. Some diseases are spread when disease-causing microorganisms on a person's hands get into food that he or she touches. When the food is eaten, the microorganisms enter the body and cause foodborne illness. Thorough handwashing with hot, soapy water prevents bacteria from transferring from hands to foods.

As mentioned, one of the food safety rules is to wash hands in hot, soapy water. Many people want to know if hot water kills bacteria. Hot water that is comfortable for handwashing is not hot enough to kill bacteria. However, body oils on your hands hold dirt and bacteria and hot or warm, soapy water is more effective than cold, soapy water at removing oily dirt and the bacteria in it. Just how hot should the water be at your handwashing station? Hot water should be between 100-110°F.

Experts estimate that proper handwashing could eliminate close to half of all cases of foodborne illness. So, now that you know the importance of handwashing, just how and when are you supposed to wash your hands?

Wash hands before and after preparing food, especial-

ly after preparing raw meat, poultry, eggs, and seafood. Additionally, wash hands after using the restroom, blowing your nose, coughing, sneezing, touching your face or hair, or whenever you've touched something that may be contaminated.



One of the most important things you can do as a manager of a food establishment is to emphasize the importance of proper handwashing to your employees. You can do this by discussing handwashing at employee meetings and posting signs at handwashing stations. Remind employees of proper handwashing technique. Hands should be washed, thoroughly scrubbing hands, wrists, fingernails, and between fingers for at least 20 seconds with hot, soapy water. They should be rinsed and then dried with a clean paper towel. You may even choose to obtain materials that make use of substances that will glow under UV light if hands are not thoroughly cleaned and hold handwashing "contests" between teams of employees in your firm. Lack of proper handwashing could easily result in a foodborne outbreak and have a very negative effect on your business. Be proactive and make handwashing a number one priority in your firm; it could save your business.

Thawing Food Safely

There are three safe ways to defrost food:

1. In the refrigerator;
2. In cold running water; and
3. In the microwave.

Refrigerator Thawing — Planning ahead is the key to this method because of the lengthy time involved. Quite often, it takes at least a full day if not more to thaw frozen food in the refrigerator.

Cold Water Thawing — This method is faster than refrigerator thawing but requires more attention. The food must be in a leak-proof package or plastic bag. If the package leaks, bacteria from the air or surrounding environment could be introduced into the food. The food should be placed under cold running tap water. Once completely thawed, the food must be cooked immediately.

Microwave Thawing — When defrosting food in a microwave, plan to cook it immediately after thawing. This is because some areas of the food may become warm and begin to cook during the defrost cycle.²

Food Security

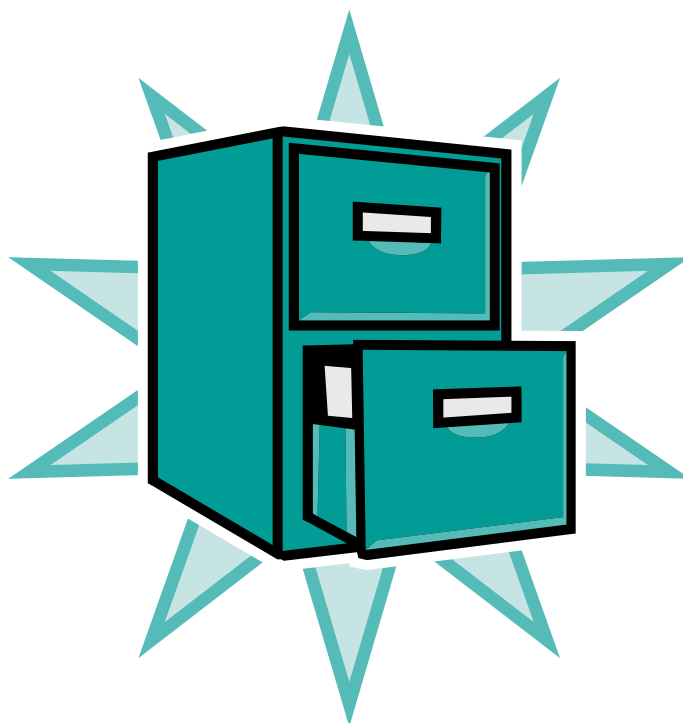
FDA Bioterrorism Record-Keeping Rule³

Domestic persons who manufacture, process, pack, transport, distribute, receive, hold, or import food; foreign persons who transport food in the U.S.; and persons who place food directly in contact with its finished container must establish and maintain records.

This regulation excludes farms, restaurants, and certain other establishments. Additional information on full and partial exclusions can be found on FDA's Bioterrorism Act Web site.

Records of Non-Transporters — Persons who own food or hold, manufacture, process, pack, import, receive, or distribute food for purposes other than transportation must have records to:

1. Identify the immediate non-transporter previous sources, whether foreign or domestic, of all foods received, including the name of the firm, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address; type of food, including brand name and specific variety; date received; quantity and type of packaging; and identity of immediate transporter's previous sources, including the name, address, telephone number, and if available, fax number and e-mail address. Persons who manufacture, process, or pack food also must include the lot or code number or other identifying information, if it exists.
2. Identify the immediate non-transporter subsequent recipients of all foods released, including the name of the firm, address, telephone number, fax number, and e-mail address; type of food, including the brand name and specific variety; date released; quantity and type of packaging; and identify the immediate transporter subsequent recipients, including the name, address, telephone number, and if available fax number and e-mail address. Persons who manufacture, process, or pack food also must include the lot or code number or other identifying information, if it exists. The records must include information that is reasonably available to identify the specific source of each ingredient that was used to make every lot of finished product.



Records of Transporters — Persons who have possession, custody, or control of an article of food in the U.S. for the sole purpose of transporting the food, whether by road, rail, water, or air must have records to include the names of the transporter's immediate previous source and the transporter's immediate subsequent recipient; origin and destination points; date shipment received and date released; number of packages; description of freight; route of movement during the time the food was transported; and transfer point(s) through which the shipment moved.

Transporters have five alternative methods, depending on the mode of transportation, of meeting the requirements described above for the final rule. Please see FDA's Bioterrorism Act website for additional information.

Record Format — Records may be kept in any format, paper or electronic, provided that they contain all of the required information. If existing records contain all of the required information, there is no need for duplication.

Length of Retention — Records must be created when the food is received, released, or transported except to the extent the information is contained in existing records. The period for which the records must be retained depends on the perishability of the food:

Type of Food	Retention Period for Non-Transporters	Retention Period for Transporters
Significant risk of spoilage, loss of value or palatability within 60 days	6 months	6 months
Significant risk of spoilage, loss of value or palatability occurring after a minimum of 60 days but within 6 months	1 year	1 year
Significant risk of spoilage, loss of value or palatability occurring no sooner than 6 months	2 years	1 year
Animal/Pet Food	1 year	1 year

Records Not Maintained — The Bioterrorism Act makes failure to establish and maintain the required records or failure to make them available to FDA a prohibited act. The Federal Government can bring a civil action in Federal court to enjoin persons who commit a prohibited act; it can also bring a criminal action in Federal court to prosecute persons who commit a prohibited act.



Effective Dates — All businesses covered by this rule must comply within 12 months from December 9, 2004, except small and very small businesses. Small businesses (11-499 full time employees) must comply within 18 months from this date, and very small businesses (10 or fewer full time employees) must comply within 24 months from this date.

For additional information on this regulation, please visit FDA's Web site at: www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsbtac23.html. A copy of the final regulation is available at www.cfsan.fda.gov/~lrd/fr04d09a.html.

Importance of a Food Security Plan — We cannot stress enough the importance of developing a food security plan in your establishment. The economic and public health impacts of an attack on our food supply could be devastating, not to mention the fear it would cause in the general population. Think about how the incidents of anthrax in the mail caused widespread anxiety and fear. Imagine what would happen if there were a large foodborne outbreak. People would be afraid to go shopping, to buy suspect foods, or to go out to eat at their favorite restaurants.

The best way to minimize the impact of such an outbreak, whether it is accidental or deliberate, is to develop a plan to minimize the risks of such an occurrence and to create an effective plan of response should such an incident occur. Help protect our nation's food supply. Take food security seriously and develop a plan specific to your establishment. For guidance materials on food security, visit our food security Web site at: www.vdacs.virginia.gov/foodsafety/bioterrorism.html.

Key Food Security Elements

- *Assign the responsibility of food security to a qualified team of individuals.*
- *Provide food security training and encourage employee buy-in.*
- *Restrict access to your facility or to certain areas of your facility to only essential persons/personnel.*
- *Monitor visitors.*
- *Keep back doors and loading dock doors closed and locked when not in use.*
- *Perform criminal background checks on employees prior to hiring.*
- *Use only known or approved sources for all ingredients and products.*

- *Inspect incoming products and raw materials for signs of tampering or counterfeiting.*
- *Compare delivery invoices with what you originally ordered and what was actually received.*
- *Identify emergency contacts and post 24-hour contact information in case of an emergency.*
- *Develop a recall plan and practice using it.*
- *Re-evaluate your food security and recall plans at least annually.*

References:

¹<http://vm.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/a2z-h.html>

²http://www.fsis.usda.gov/fact_sheets/Big_Thaw/index.asp

³<http://www.cfsan.fda.gov/~dms/fsbtac23.html>

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